

My name is Dawn Russello of Guilford, CT and I am writing to express my opposition to HB6380 and SB1012, bills that would consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) into the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

My son, Alexander, is a legally blind 10 year-old who has been receiving services from BESB staff since January of 2006. Over the years, the close working relationship between the members of Children's Services division, the Vocational Rehabilitation division, the Adult Services division and the Business Enterprise Program have become very apparent to me. I have attended both student and parent centered programs presented by the agency and many of these events were the planned and presented by members of several divisions of BESB.

One program I attended was on assistive technology available to visually impaired students. The staff presenting the program provided very helpful information about the devices available. Much more valuable to me, however were the success stories of clients served by each staff member or one of their co-workers. Staff members were able to share examples of how the resources they were presenting were being successfully used in a variety of situations by students of all ages. They helped me see the possibilities available to my son.

The collaborative environment created by the current structure of all of the divisions being centered in one location will be lost if these bills are passed. It is through regular interaction with members of the other divisions that each of the instructors and staff members is able to continuously improve his or her strategies, techniques, and general knowledge of the disability they are dealing with.

As a special education teacher myself, I can say with certainty that personal success stories and "lessons learned" that are shared by colleagues often serve as valuable resources to a teacher. The support and guidance of others who are working with the same type of population is essential. It is through dialogue with others that we learn, or are reintroduced to great teaching techniques and strategies. The current centralization of the staff who works with the visually impaired provides a wonderfully supportive environment. At BESB, teachers currently have regular access to, and the opportunity to draw upon the experiences of their colleagues.

Another significant benefit to the current centralization of services is the connectedness that allows for a smooth transition of services. Staff from each of the divisions is accessible to, and goes out of their way to make themselves available to, both staff from other divisions and individuals currently served by other divisions. Although my son is still in elementary school, I have already been introduced to some of the opportunities and services that will be available to him later in life. This is only possible because the divisions work together to help families not only prepare for the future, but set great goals for their visually impaired children. I am greatly concerned that exposure to, and the opportunity to gain early understanding of the services available to older individuals will decrease or become obsolete if BESB is separated.

This is why I oppose bills HB6380 and SB1012.